employees does not adequately cover the cost of dental and vision care, yet regular visits to the eye doctor and the dentist are just as important for maintaining overall health as annual visits to the M.D. That is why Chairman DAVIS, Rep. JOANN DAVIS, Senator SUSAN COLLINS, myself and others have made the addition of supplemental dental and vision benefits to the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program a priority.

According to testimony we heard last year in the Government Reform Committee, while 56 percent of Americans have dental coverage, of 150 FEHBP plans studied, only one provided dental coverage for children and only 14 provided orthodontic coverage. Unfortunately, there are not a lot of options for federal employees when it comes to vision insurance either. The FEHBP is often cited as a leader and a model for health care plans across the Nation. It is unacceptable that federal employees and their families are denied quality coverage for dental and vision services.

The Federal Employees Dental and Vision Benefits Enhancement Act of 2004 seeks to address this situation by leveraging the purchasing power of the federal government to obtain supplemental dental and vision benefits for federal employees. This much-needed legislation is patterned after the successful long-term care benefits program we already offer federal employees and will provide tangible relief to millions of federal employees and their families.

The new benefits would be offered separately from existing health care plans and would be available strictly on a voluntary basis. Since federal employees opting to take advantage of these benefits would pay 100 percent of the premiums, we can offer these policies at very little cost to the federal government. This legislation is a win-win for all parties involved.

Recently, I chaired a subcommittee hearing on steps the federal government can take to lead the way in reducing health care costs by taking advantage of our missive purchasing power, investing in new health care technologies and promoting good health through preventative care. This legislation is a step in that direction. The federal government must lead by example when it comes to health care and I ask my colleagues to support that effort by voting in favor of this bill.

□ 1515

Mr. TOM DAVIS of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I urge support for the bill, S. 2657.

Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SIMPSON). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. TOM DAVIS) that the House suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill, S. 2657.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the Senate bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

AMENDING THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA COLLEGE ACCESS ACT OF 1999

Mr. TOM DAVIS of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and concur in the Senate amendments to the bill (H.R. 4012) to amend the District of Columbia College Access Act of 1999 to reauthorize for 5 additional years the public school and private school tuition assistance programs established under the Act.

The Clerk read as follows:

Senate Amendments:

Page 2, line 7, strike ''10 succeeding'' and insert ''7 succeeding''.

Page 2, line 11, strike ''10 succeeding'' and insert ''7 succeeding''.

Amend the title so as to read: ''An Act to amend the District of Columbia College Access Act of 1999 to reauthorize for 2 additional years the public school and private school tuition assistance programs established under the Act.''.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. TOM DAVIS) and the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. TOM DAVIS).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. TOM DAVIS of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 4012.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Virginia?

There was no objection.

Mr. TOM DAVIS of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 4012, legislation to authorize the District of Columbia College Access Act for 2 additional years.

The College Access Program has been a key component of the District's revitalization efforts in recent years. It is critical that Congress continue to support its partnership with the District of Columbia in providing access to higher education resources and opportunities.

Congress established the D.C. College Access Program in 1999 for two primary reasons. First, the program addressed the fact that the District of Columbia does not have a State university system like most States do for its high school graduates. The program essentially leveled the playing field for high school graduates in the Nation's Capital by enabling them to attend colleges and universities around the country at instate tuition rates. This is State universities around the country.

The program's second purpose was to deter tax-paying families in the District from moving to surrounding States in order to take advantage of instate higher education options available to residents in other States that were not available to District residents at the time that would deprive the District of very much needed stability in tax revenue should they leave the jurisdiction.

I cannot tell you how many mothers and fathers have approached me to say thank you. We were going to have to leave the District of Columbia so our kid could go to college, but thanks to this program we can stay; or young people from the district that come up to me and say thank you for this act. I am now able to afford to go to a good college.

At a Committee on Government Reform hearing on this program last March, it is clear that the program has been more than an anecdotal success over the past 5 years. D.C. Mayor Anthony Williams testified that since creation of the program, the number of high school graduates in the District continuing on to college has increased 28 percent. The national average over the same period was an increase of approximately 5 percent.

The impact of the College Access Program is undeniable. According to a survey of high school graduates in the District, the vast majority of students who have received assistance through the program have indicated that the existence of the grants made a difference in their decision to attend college and was a key factor in deciding which college to attend.

H.R. 4012 represents a shot at a better education and, in turn, a better life for hundreds of D.C. students.

The House passed a 5-year authorization for the program in July, but after discussions with the other body, we have agreed to limit the reauthorization to 2 years while we in Congress continue to work with the city to refine the scope and the mission of the program.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 4012 and to continue to support a level playing field for high school graduates in the District.

I also want to acknowledge my friend and colleague, the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) for her help in starting this bill and working through this legislation today as we reauthorize it, and my colleague, the gentleman from Alexandria, Virginia (Mr. MORAN), who has also been very helpful and instrumental in getting this legislation originally established and reauthorizing it today.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the kind words and acknowledgement of the chairman. I particularly appreciate the strong leadership he has given this bill from its inception and the continuing strong leadership he has afforded this absolutely vital bill to the residents of the District of Columbia.

Led by my good friend, the chairman of the Committee on Government Reform, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. TOM DAVIS), the District of Columbia College Access Act of 1999 has

always passed with bipartisan sponsors in the House and Senate and consistently strong support from Members of both bodies. We are particularly indebted to the chairman, who, because of the importance of higher education to those who live and work in this white-collar region, has always made this bill a priority of the committee.

This year he performed an additional critical act of leadership. When a problem arose in the Senate after the bill was approved in committee, he forged an acceptable compromise. The champions of the bill in the Senate have been a chairman, Senator GEORGE VOINOVICH and his ranking member, Senator DICK DURBIN of the subcommittee with jurisdiction over the District of Columbia, as well as the Chair of the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, Senator SUSAN COLLINS and the ranking member, Senator JOE LIEBERMAN.

Mr. Speaker, I want to express special gratitude to President Bush, who came to office several years after the law was in effect, saw the evidence of its exceptional success, and has continued to fund it in his budget at authorized levels.

The act, which partially funds college tuition through tuition access grants, or TAG, gives D.C. residents opportunities for college attendance that other Americans already enjoy through their State university systems. Because the District has no State university system, TAG substitutes for such a system by allowing D.C. residents to attend the public colleges in the States at instate tuition rates, subsidized up to $10,000. In the alternative, our students may receive $2,500 to attend private colleges at historically black colleges or universities in the city or region or other private colleges, provisions that also imitate what some States allow.

Already some 6,000 D.C. students have attended more than 150 colleges nationwide because of funds provided by the act. There are two particularly gratifying results from the first years of the Act. First, college attendance in the District has increased by 28 percent compared with only 11 percent nationally. Second, the act has been important to keeping tax-paying residents in the city and stemming the large and disastrous taxpayers' losses of the past three decades, particularly of parents who often left for the suburbs when their children were in reach of college age, rather than deny their children the benefits of a lower-cost, high-quality State university system. The high cost of tuition is a significant reason many residents left the District and others refuse to settle here.

The evidence of the success of the program and the return on the dollar to residents, to the city itself and to the Federal Government is not in dispute. Close monitoring by the GAO, by the committee and by our office have shown that TAG has been well run. TAG is universally popular among D.C. residents and businesses because of the act's simultaneous and immediate benefits to higher education in the District and, therefore, to the economic stability and viability of the city itself.

The program is an unqualified success and continues to exceed all expectations. The program has proved itself in becoming a valuable catalyst to where it is most needed. TAG deserves reauthorization, and I strongly urge its passage.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. TOM DAVIS of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. MORAN).

Mr. MORAN of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman of the Committee on Government Reform for yielding me time, but particularly for his leadership on this bill and the preceding bill.

This bill provides opportunities to young people who have already not only graduated from high school, but showed exceptional academic achievement. Many of them had to overcome social and economic barriers that we would never want or expect our own children to be able to cope with, let alone overcome. It's not fair that in the District of Columbia they do not have the opportunities that many of our children in the suburbs have. To make at least this very important access to higher education available to them at a very reasonable cost is a terribly appropriate thing to do.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the leadership of the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) on behalf of her constituents and the leadership of the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. TOM DAVIS) on behalf of the Congress to make sure that this legislation gets through.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

In closing, I want to say that the two gentlemen from which we just heard on the bill, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. MORAN) who just spoke, and the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. TOM DAVIS) who has led the bill, are both from this region.

This may be the most white-collar region in the United States. When District of Columbia residents did not have access to its State university system, it hurt the entire economy of the region because it meant the critical core of the region could not provide the same State university systems that are very beautifully provided in Maryland and Virginia. So one part of the region could not contribute to the economic viability of the region.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate particularly their work in understanding how vital the District's contribution was and is, and that it cannot be made except through higher education of the kind that is expected through this region.

Finally, a word about the Chair. This bill was finally passed in the Senate only in the lame duck session. It has been passed here because the chairman had smoothly led its passage in the House. It did not have a bit of controversy here. There were some changes made after some consultation with the House with the Senate, and all was well; and at the last minute a very small problem arose in the Senate. But when one person raises a problem in the Senate, that can mean the end of an entire bill. So I do want to say right here on this floor that the work of the chairman when we brought this to his attention that all efforts in the Senate to solve this one problem with one Member had failed for reasons no one could put their finger on, that his own creative sense of compromise is what rescued the bill in the Senate.

I want to express my deep appreciation for his work in the midst of the lame duck session, to think of what might be done, and then to speak with the Member in the Senate who raised an issue, and then to come forward with a compromise that has proved acceptable to all. We are very grateful for that, because without that work on the part of Chairman DAVIS, we would not be here.

□ 1530

This bill would not be authorized, and we would not be able to get the full amount which has already been passed by the appropriation committees on both sides into the President's budget when it comes here in January.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. TOM DAVIS of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I thank my colleagues for their kind words and their efforts in working together on this legislation, and I would urge all Members to support the Senate amendments to H.R. 4012.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SIMPSON). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. TOM DAVIS) that the House suspend the rules and concur in the Senate amendments to the bill, H.R. 4012.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the Senate amendments were concurred in.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

AMENDING INTERNAL REVENUE CODE TO MODIFY TAXATION OF ARROW COMPONENTS

Mr. RYAN of Wisconsin. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 5394) to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to modify the taxation of arrow components.

The Clerk read as follows: